



The Asian-American Community and Educational Equality

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What is the “Asian-American community”? Does such a thing even exist? This is a question that policy makers across the country are now debating. Already, the Common Application divides Asian applicants into 10 ethnic subcategories, and bills have been put forward in California and Massachusetts to collect census data along similar lines. These developments speak to our peculiar position within most Americans’ racial consciousness. We are no more than a *mere afterthought* to the national conversation about black and white race relations, racial categories that precede the founding of America. By contrast, the “Asian-American community” is a creation of the 1960s rather than a deeply-rooted historical reality. Thus before even speaking about racial preferences in educational policy, we must first situate the “Asian-American community” in a historical context and examine if enduring value remains for this fluid concept. This essay reaffirms the importance of the Asian-American community in the fight to end racial discrimination, and demonstrates that policies promoting racial “equity” are deeply pernicious to this end.

The racial history of the United States is by now well contemplated, while the accurate place of Asian Americans in “fitting in” the broad history is not. Historian Theodore W. Allen traces American race thinking to plantation colonies in Virginia, where African and European servants revolted together against their masters. Allen argues that the idea of “whiteness” emerges as a form of social privilege - in the literal sense of additional rights - conferred by plantation owners onto white servants to divide working-class oppositions. Much of the history of American immigration concerns the expansion of white social privileges from Anglo-Saxon protestants to later Irish, Italian, Jewish, and Central and Eastern European immigrants. But Asian immigrants were hopelessly perceived as collectively “oriental”, even though the inter-ethnic unity was spurious at best. Chinese Americans even actively distanced themselves from Japanese Americans during Internment. It was not until the 1960s that civil rights activist Dr. Yuji Ichioka coined the term “Asian-American” for the very first time to unite Japanese, Chinese, and Filipino Americans in a common cause against discrimination. The modern Asian-American community was thus born with the formation of the Asian-American Political Alliance at the University of California, Berkeley. The very foundation of the Asian-American community was thus an act of self-definition against mainstream racial thinking. The ultimate goal of our community has always been to end racial discrimination.

The Asian-American community remains ever relevant so long as racial thinking persists in the United States. In response to reservations about adopting the term to encompass immigrants from South and Southeast Asia, who did not belong to Dr. Ichioka’s original coalition, I argue that our Asian-American identity is actually neither racial nor cultural, even though the concept of “Asian-ness” arose out of racial thinking. “Asian-ness” as a racial idea is



inherently incoherent, as race is an incoherent category. No reasonable person should confuse a Korean restaurant with an Indian restaurant, and referring to the two with the same word - “Asian” - is not meaningful in any cultural sense. The Asian-American identity has therefore always been a principally *political idea*. We are united by a political necessity, for we cannot simply disengage ourselves from the place we occupy in American racial thinking (which groups Koreans and Indians together). But we can strive for a future where race no longer exists. We must therefore strive to expand the Asian-American coalition to encompass all former ethnic groups considered “oriental” to maximize our strength in the coming struggle. The point is not to create a lasting cultural identity. The point is to abolish racial thinking for good. The point is to win. Then we will be no longer relevant.

With the revelations of *Students for Fair Admissions v. Harvard*, the continued necessity of the Asian-American community is all but self-evident, although the new threat comes from identitarian progressives rather than old-school racists. Progressive policy makers are attempting to award special privileges to certain racial groups over others to rectify historical wrongs. They call this progress toward *equity*. But they have no vision of when these extraordinary measures will come to an end and have inadvertently worked to re-institutionalize racial discrimination against Asians. Unfortunately, like the Bolsheviks who argued that the state would simply wither away once the aims of the revolution were achieved, the functionaries of the new racially redistributive regime likewise find themselves unable and unwilling to renounce racial thinking. Imagine a bureaucrat with decades of experience peacefully accepting the irrelevance of his or her post! This conceit is born out of the same arrogance that presumes manufacturing workers can simply move on to better things when their jobs become automated and obsolete. It is a cold and narrow understanding of human life that does not understand the relationship of work and identity. Imagine what will happen when an entrenched diversity elite, fully immersed in the most powerful institutions of our country---our universities, our media organizations, our corporations, and even political offices, must reckon with the fact that they are no longer necessary. What will happen then? Perhaps they will twist and turn the definition of racism to justify their continued existence. Perhaps they will brand those who oppose them as race-traitors in continued perpetuation of racial ideas. Perhaps they will lie and intimidate to get their way. This happens every day now on college campuses, as we turn our attention towards “microaggressions” rather than the truly institutional racism that they themselves practice.

I applaud the noble sentiments of equity advocates, but what they do not understand is that their attempt to “correctly” institutionalize racial preferences is functionally no different from when the plantation owners in Virginia conferred the privileges of “whiteness”. An elite constructs a system of social privileges from the top down rather than allow us to define our relationship with America’s racial history. Race takes on an institutional significance that cannot easily be shaken off. The classic thought experiment that makes the case for equity (rather than equality) is a testament to this. It features three children standing in front of a fence, attempting to see a baseball game. One child is short, one child is tall, and one child is somewhere in between, but only the tall child can see past the fence. Equality means that each of the children



gets handed one crate to stand on. Equal distribution ensures that the medium-sized and tall child can see beyond the fence, but the short child still cannot see. In contrast, equity means that the short child is given two crates, the medium-sized child is given one crate, while the tall child is given no crates, so all the children can see. But there are several major problems with the experiment, namely that the three subjects *must be dependent children with no agency of their own*. The children are passive and unable to negotiate the use of the crates among themselves. There is no consideration about whether the children want to watch the game or not - it is merely assumed to be good. The recent attempts to subdivide Asian Americans speak to this very problem. We cannot be trusted to be “equal” and negotiate our own identity. An enlightened master must make decisions for us. And we know that there are no truly enlightened masters. Progressive policy makers remain steeped in racial thinking, “for the master’s tools can never dismantle the master’s house...”

As the founding of the Asian-American community is rooted in opposition to racial discrimination, I believe that this very community is uniquely positioned to help end race thinking in this country. But before I close this essay, I must note that Asian-American conservatives often fail to appreciate the power of enduring institutional racism. Beyond the abolition of slavery and the signing of the 13th, 14th, and 15th amendments, there is an entire history of failed economic reconstruction, resurgent white supremacy, brutal terrorism against black politicians, segregationist laws, and penal slavery. A million Black Americans were denied civil rights straight through the Second World War, when their White counterparts were able to take advantage of the GI Bill and enter the American middle class with a college education. And after the Civil Rights Movement succeeded? Whether it be through the misguided Great Society Programs of LBJ that created the modern welfare state and its perverse incentives, or through the beginning of mass job-offshoring of low-skill work, Black Americans were denied yet more opportunities. The ravages of the cocaine epidemic in the 1980s wrought yet more violence and terror as policy makers struggled to respond. *All of these tragedies were allowed to happen because of the endurance of institutionalized racial consciousness*. In order to achieve true equality, the Asian-American community must struggle to abolish racial thinking *in its entirety*, which has always been a tool of the strong to divide the weak. But I have faith that we are uniquely up to the task, as the founding principle of the Asian-American Community is the same principle enshrined in the *Declaration of Independence*: “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal” -- NOT equitable.

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